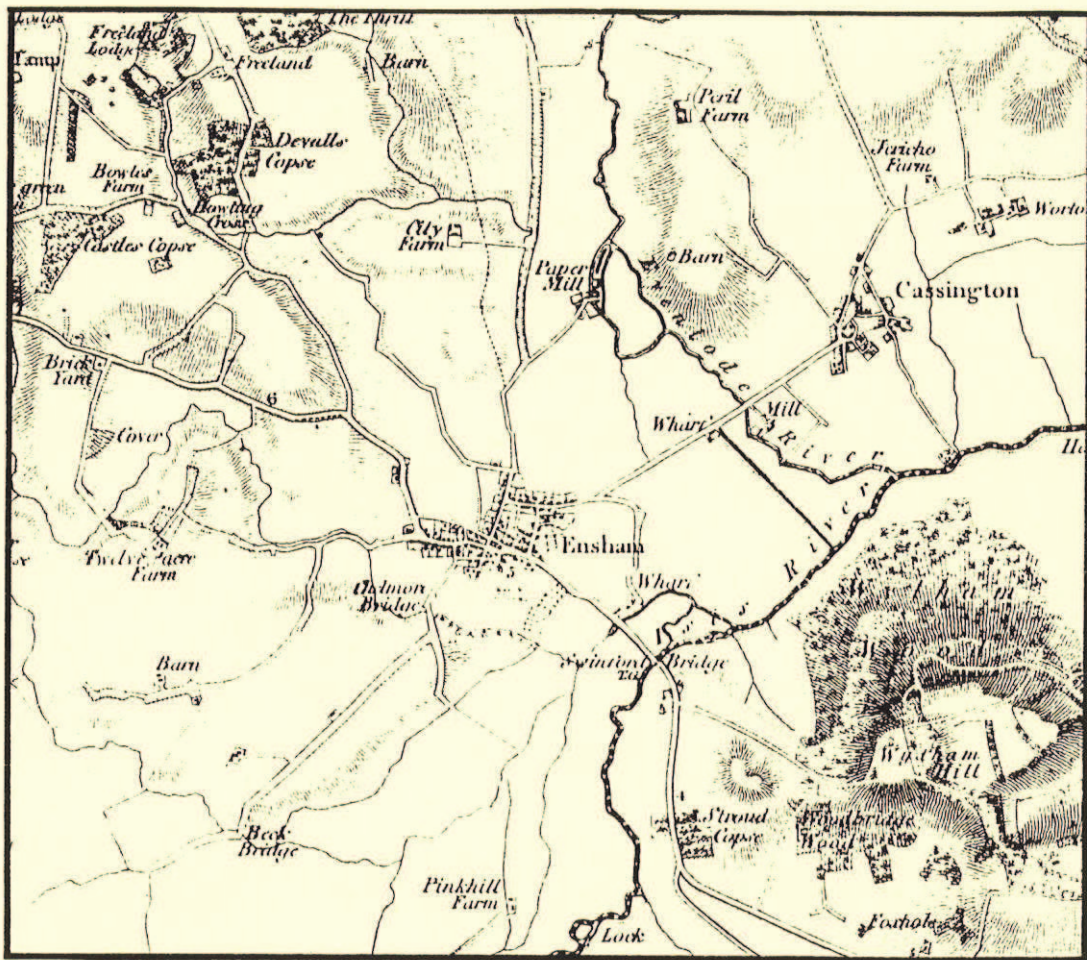


39 HIGH STREET, EYNSHAM

Report on Watching Brief



OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

December 1994

39 HIGH STREET, EYNHAM
(SP 4343 0929)

Report on Watching Brief

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SUMMARY

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Oxford Archaeological Unit during the redevelopment of land at 39 High Street Eynsham by Blenheim Construction Ltd. The excavation of the foundations for four houses and accompanying garages was observed and all visible features rapidly recorded prior to the pouring of concrete. One certain and one possible medieval pit, seven post-medieval pits and one ditch of possible medieval date were located sealed beneath a substantial build-up of garden soil. No features or artefacts pre-dating the medieval period, with the exception of a single Romano-British sherd, were found and no evidence for the existence of an earlier building was discernible along the street frontage.

1 Introduction

The site of the proposed development is located on the north side of Eynsham High Street, approximately 20 m west of the junction with Queen Street (Fig. 1). It is situated at approximately 67 m OD on the second terrace gravel overlying Oxford clay.

In January 1994 a planning application was submitted to West Oxfordshire District Council by Blenheim Construction Ltd for permission to demolish the existing garage buildings and to erect four two-storey dwellings with garages. The Oxfordshire County Archaeological Service recommended that in line with PPG 16 an archaeological field evaluation should be undertaken to define the extent, character and level of survival of below ground archaeological deposits as a condition attached to the planning permission. The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) were subsequently commissioned by Blenheim Construction Ltd to undertake the necessary archaeological work.

2 Archaeological Background

The area is known to be rich in archaeological remains. The OAU has previously undertaken a programme of excavation and survey (Keevill forthcoming) within the precinct of Eynsham Benedictine Abbey, founded in 1005 on the site of an earlier Anglo-Saxon minster church (SAM 118), directly south of the site. This work has revealed evidence of a sequence of activity from the Bronze Age to the medieval period. A watching Brief in 1975 (Chambers 1976) and an evaluation (OAU 1992) within the grounds of The Shrubbery on the opposite side of the High Street has also revealed Roman features and Anglo-Saxon buildings. Early medieval pottery has also

been recovered from the east side of the junction of High Street and Queen Street. The development site also lies within the bounds of the medieval town of Eynsham.

3 Archaeological Work

The original brief prepared by the Assistant County Archaeologist required the archaeological evaluation of the site by means of a 4% trenching sample, equivalent to two 15 x 1.5 m trenches. In July 1994 the OAU provided the Assistant County Archaeologist with a specification for the work. However, following a reappraisal of the level of disturbance to the site the Assistant County Archaeologist concluded that the formal evaluation was unnecessary and that only a watching brief was required during the excavation of the foundations for the new houses and garages. Three visits were subsequently made on 27 July, 28 July and 23 November by Bob Williams and Chris Bell. By the time of the first visit the site had been cleared of above ground structures and the excavation of the foundations for the most westerly house (Plot 4) had commenced. All the foundations for Plots 2, 3 and 4, at the rear of the property, were excavated and recorded in July and Plot 1, fronting the High Street, was completed in November.

3 Results

Most of the development site was covered with a layer of friable very dark grey loam, averaging 0.40 m thick and directly overlying the second terrace gravel. This undoubtedly represents the build up over many centuries of a well worm-sorted humic garden soil. Only for a distance of 8 m back from the street frontage was this topsoil much thinner, probably having been removed when the tarmac 'apron' had been constructed to the former garage. At least two large brick-built inspection pits, several fuel tanks, a possible coal bunker, a modern sewer pipe and a late Victorian rubbish pit had all been dug into the gravel substrate causing significant disturbance to any archaeological levels which may have existed. Notwithstanding this, observation of the foundation trenches revealed one pit (21) of certain and one pit (10) of possible medieval date, seven pits (2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 11 and 22) of post-medieval date and a single ditch (5/7) of probable post-medieval date as indicated on Figure 2. Sections of the pits, all of which had very steep sides, were rapidly cleaned with a trowel or shovel prior to the pouring of concrete and briefly recorded with any finds removed for later analysis.

Pit 2

A large pit at least 2 m across and 1.40 m deep located in the north-west corner of Plot 4. Filled with a very loose grey-brown loam containing numerous animal bones and oyster shells. A large out-turned dish rim sherd of Brill type indicates a late 17th or early 18th century date.

Pit 3

A small pit 0.75 m across and 0.85 m deep located in the foundation trench of the party wall between Plots 3 and 4. Filled with a loose grey-brown loam. Contained one small sherd of Tudor Green fineware of 16th or 17th century date.

Pit 4

Late Victorian rubbish pit 3 m south of Pit 3 , 1.30 m across and 0.90 m deep containing a quantity of heavily corroded scrap iron objects and broken pottery and porcelain vessels.

Pit 6

A pit, 1.40 m across and at least 1 m deep, located in the foundation trench for the north wall of the garage to Plot 4, filled with a medium grey gravelly loam. A single Roman pottery sherd was found in the fill but, given the similarity of pit fill and type to other nearby pits, this is likely to have been residual.

Pit 8

A large pit at least 2 m across and 1 m deep, located in the north-east corner of Plot 3, filled with a dark grey loam. Contained a sherd of 19th century transfer-printed ware and a fragment of green bottle glass.

Pit 9

A very large pit, located in the north-east corner of Plot 2, partially destroyed by a brick-built inspection pit. It was at least 1.80 m across and over 1.80 m deep, the base extending below the excavated base of the foundation. It contained a loose homogenous dark grey sandy loam fill with no evidence of any layering. A large piece of heavily corroded iron sheet of probable post-medieval date was the only find.

Pit 10

A pit of very similar type to Pit 9 containing an identical fill, but of slightly lesser proportions. Its base was also not reached only being recorded to a maximum of 1.60 m deep. It contained a single medieval sherd in the coarse limestone fabric (MDCL).

Pit 11

A small pit, 1.10 m across and 1 m deep filled with a grey-brown loam, located 3 m south of Pit 10 in the same foundation trench for Plot 2.

Pit 21

A pit at least 1 m across and 1.10 m deep, located in the east foundation trench of Plot 1. It had been cut through by the stone foundation of the adjacent property, 40 High Street. It had slightly irregular sides and a concave base and was filled with a brown sandy loam mixed with gravel including lenses of fine gravel and charcoal. Five sherds of medieval pottery of 12th or 13th century date were recovered from its fill.

Pit 22

A small pit at least 1 m across and 1.20 m deep located in the north-east corner of Plot 1. It was filled with a similar fill to that of Pit 21 but contained no finds.

Ditch 5/7

Originally recorded as two separate pits in the foundation trenches at either end of Plot 3, it is suggested that they represent a linear ditch aligned on a north-south axis, owing to their identical proportions and distinctive fills. Both recorded sections indicate that the ditch was up to 1.60 m wide and 1 m deep with relatively steep sides and a flat bottom. Filled with the same grey-brown loose loamy fill as most of the pits this ditch contained a layer of clean gravel in its base just above a dark grey primary silt. A single medieval sherd was recovered from Feature 7.

4 Pottery by Cathy Underwood-Keevill

A small assemblage of Roman (Pit 6), medieval (Unstratified, Ditch 5/7, Pit 10 and Pit 20) and post-medieval pottery (Unstratified, Pit 2, Pit 3 and Pit 8) was recovered from the site as tabulated below. The pottery types compare well with material from Eynsham Thames Water pipeline, Eynsham St Peters Church and Eynsham Abbey.

<i>Period</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Weight</i>
Roman	1	10g
Medieval	14	587g
Post-medieval	7	149g
Total	22	746g

The Roman pottery sherd, found in Pit 6, is an Oxfordshire colour-coated ware bowl rim, a copy of Dragendorf form 33; an uncommon type in the Oxfordshire series and therefore undated (Young 1977, 170).

The medieval pottery, is similar to the limestone-tempered wares at Eynsham Thames Water pipeline and can be equated with types at Witney. A dense limestone tempered ware (MDDL) is the most common type, with one unstratified cresset lamp spiked base in the coarse limestone fabric (MDCL). Both these fabric types were predominant in the Eynsham Thames Water pipeline assemblage and were dated from the late 11th century/early 12th century to the early 13th century. The common type at Witney termed Witney Early Medieval Ware, a type possibly the same as MCDL, is dated to the same period. Eynsham High Street pottery corresponds to the limestone tempered ware tradition that is particularly prevalent in West Oxfordshire. A small quantity of Oxford Medieval Ware (Oxford fabric Y) is also present. An unstratified cooking pot rim is dated from the early to mid 12th century.

The post-medieval pottery dates from the 16th (with one sherd of Tudor Green fineware) to the 19th centuries with blue and white transfer printed ware. It is particularly interesting in that pottery dating from the 18th century onwards is notably absent from other sites in Eynsham and in West Oxfordshire.

5 Other Finds

Pit 2

3 fragments of animal bone
3 oyster shells

Pit 3

1 animal tooth

Pit 8

Small fragment of thin green bottle glass of post-medieval date
19th century broken clay pipe bowl with spur and part stem - poorly moulded initials F/P - P on spur

Pit 9

Fragment of heavily corroded iron sheet.

6 Discussion

Although other work in this part of Eynsham has indicated that the proposed development site contained considerable archaeological potential the results of the watching brief suggest that little activity, other than the digging of pits has ever taken place in the area. Perhaps surprisingly no evidence for either a medieval or post-medieval building was noted along the High Street frontage. The only definite feature of medieval date is Pit 21, which contained five large sherds. Pit 10 and Ditch 5/7 contained a single small medieval sherd each, which in both cases could have been residual. Relatively few unstratified sherds of medieval date were found either in the

topsoil or redeposited in any of the later pits, further reinforcing the view that no medieval occupation had occurred on the site. There is no evidence of any prehistoric, or Saxon activity on the site. The single Roman sherd is not entirely surprising given the sites relatively close proximity to the Shrubbery site (OAU 19920 to the south which contains Roman features. Apart from the one ditch (5/7) which could conceivably be of medieval date rather than post-medieval, all of the post-medieval activity is represented by pits of differing sizes. It must however, be noted that some of these pits could be ditches as it is often difficult to accurately interpret the exact form of features in narrow foundation trenches. The function of these pits is difficult to establish. All had steep sides and several were probably very large and over 2 m deep. None contained a sufficient volume of artefacts to suggest that they were primarily for the disposal of refuse. It is possible that some may have acted as small quarries for gravel and sand for use in the immediate vicinity. The similarity of the topsoil with the pit fills indicate that the deep topsoil existed when most of the pits were backfilled by hand rather than silted up by natural processes. This conclusion is also supported by the steep unweathered sides of the pits. The nature and depth of the topsoil suggests that prior to the construction of the garage, which formerly stood on the site, the area had been a garden throughout the post-medieval and perhaps even medieval periods.

7 Bibliography

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Robert J Williams
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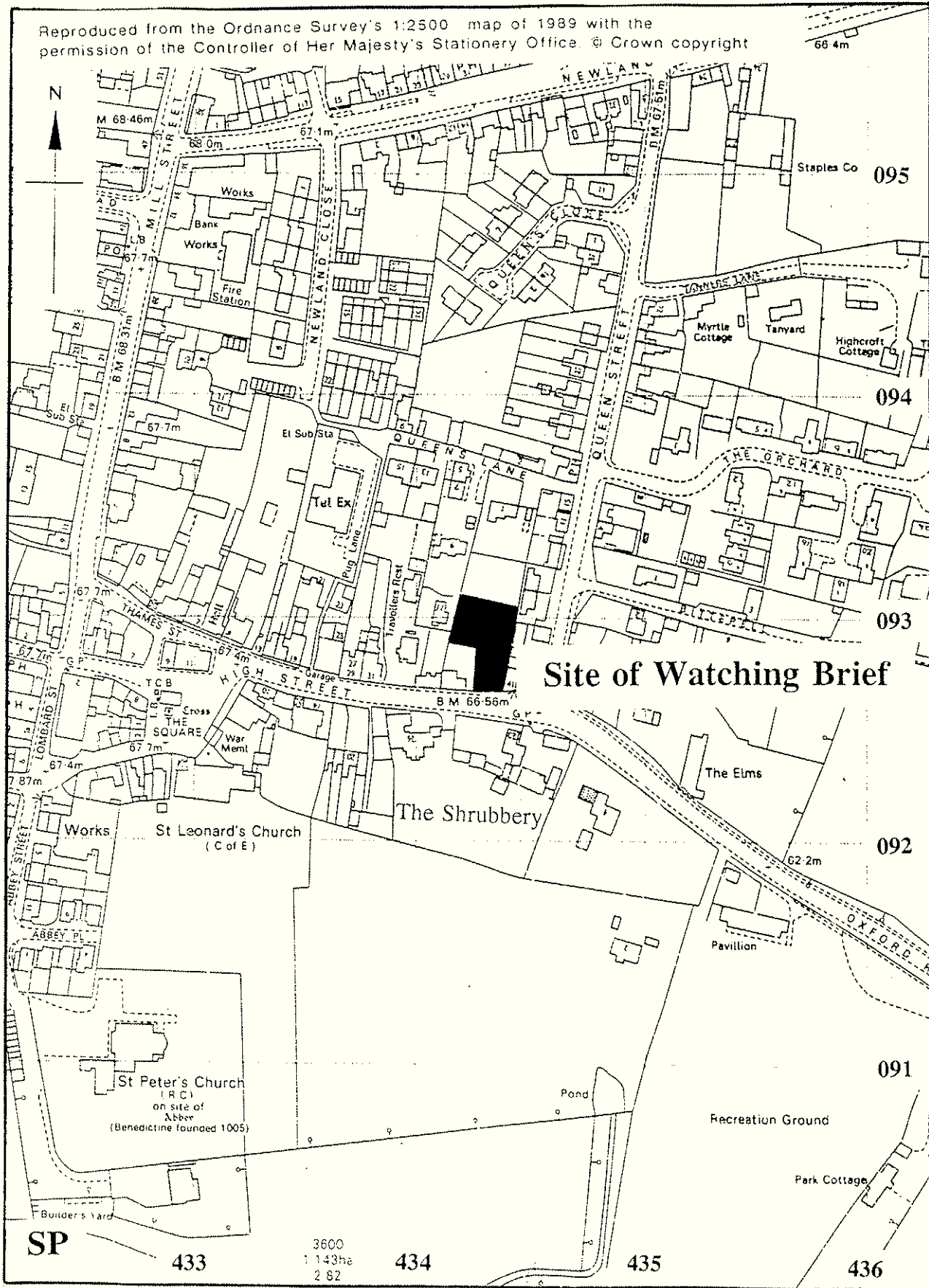


Fig. 1 Location map

Oxford Archaeological Unit
46 Hythe Bridge Street
Oxford OX1 2EP

Tel: 0865 243888 Fax: 0865 793496

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